

Possible Misreading in 1 Maccabees 7:34 in Light of Its Biblical Model

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First Maccabees 7:34 employs four verbs to describe the offensive speech by Nicanor, the Seleucid general, addressed to the Jewish elders and priests. The third verb indicates that Nicanor defiled his audience. While this has led scholars to associate 1 Maccabees with the Jewish concept of gentile impurity, several factors suggest that, at this point, an error found its way into the Greek translation from the original Hebrew. The present argument comprises three steps. First, I use the biblical Sennacherib story, featured in the background of the Nicanor episode in 1 Maccabees, as a means of reconstructing the relevant original Hebrew verb employed by 1 Maccabees. Second, I suggest a possible misreading of one letter on the part of the Greek translator. Finally, I propose that a similar, earlier verse in 1 Maccabees, 1:24b, may have been conducive to the translator's commission of this mistake, thus offering an insight into his way of thinking.

I. A VERB CLEARLY OUT OF CONTEXT

First Maccabees 7:34 employs four verbs to describe the insulting nature of the speech by Nicanor, the Seleucid general, directed at the Jewish elders and the priests of the Jerusalem temple who emerged from the temple to greet him: “he mocked them, derided them, defiled them, and spoke arrogantly” (ἐμυκτήρισεν αὐτοὺς καὶ κατεγέλασεν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐμίανεν αὐτοὺς καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφάνως).¹ The third verb, “defile,” plainly differs from the other verbs in this verse: it does not relate to the nature of the speech but rather to a cultic or ritual consequence of some physical act committed by Nicanor. Such an act, however, remains unspecified,²

¹ All translations from Hebrew provided in this article are mine, unless otherwise specified. Translation of Greek verbs is based on LSJ.

² Elia S. Artom speculated that perhaps Nicanor committed a disgraceful act (*The Apocryphal Books* [Hebrew] [Tel Aviv: Yavneh, 1958], 1:48).

and the fourth and final verb (accompanied by an adverb) returns to the description of Nicanor's speech. At face value, the use here of "defile" would appear to be out of context. The following observations further reinforce this impression:

1. Why would Nicanor constitute a source of defilement? Rabbinic literature, a Jewish corpus with a developed concept of gentile impurity,³ tells of a figure—variously a king, an Arab, an Arab king, or a foreign ruler—who spoke with a high priest and accidentally spat upon him, rendering him impure and hence temporarily unfit for service.⁴ Consequently, in explaining the source of the defilement in 1 Macc 7:34, commentators lean heavily on this story.⁵ Yet 1 Maccabees shows little sympathy toward gentiles.⁶ It therefore would not have hesitated to refer to

³Christine E. Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Inter-marriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 122–31.

⁴See t. Yoma 3:20 (Lieberman ed., 248); Avot of Rabbi Nathan, recension A 35 (Schechter ed., 104), b. Yoma 47a; y. Meg 1:9 (72a) and parallels. Compare t. Niddah 5:3 (Zuckerman ed., 645); and see Adolf Büchler, "The Levitical Impurity of the Gentile in Palestine before the Year 70," *JQR* 17 (1926): 1–81, here 4–9; Gedalyahu Alon, "The Levitical Uncleanness of Gentiles," in *Jews, Judaism and the Classical World: Studies in Jewish History in the Times of the Second Temple and Talmud*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 146–89, here 153, 165; and Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshuṭah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta*, part 4, *Order Mo'ed* [Hebrew] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 805–6.

⁵John R. Bartlett (*The First and Second Books of the Maccabees*, CBC [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973], 101) and Jonathan A. Goldstein (*I Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 41 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976], 327, 340) even translated the verse accordingly, namely, that Nicanor "spat on them," and "rendered them unclean with his spit," respectively. Others, who adhere to the translation "defiled them," adopt the "spit thesis" in an accompanying note: Hugo Bévenot, *Die beiden Makkabäerbücher*, HSAT (Bonn: Hanstein, 1931), 99; Félix-Marie Abel, *Les livres des Maccabées*, Ebib (Paris: Gabalda, 1949), 140; Uriel Rappaport, *The First Book of Maccabees: Introduction, Hebrew Translation, and Commentary* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2004), 216; and Daniel J. Harrington, *First and Second Maccabees*, New Collegeville Bible Commentary: Old Testament 12 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 48–51. Quite a few scholars mention that the medieval Hebrew text Josippon says explicitly that "Nicanor spat against the Sanctuary" (David Flusser, *The Josippon, Edited with an Introduction, Commentary, and Notes* [Hebrew], 2 vols. [Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1978–1981] 1:104). See Johann M. A. Scholz, *Die Bücher der Makkabäer* (Frankfurt am Main: Barrentrapp, 1833), 107; Carl L. W. Grimm, *Das erste Buch der Maccabäer*, KEH (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1853), 115; Carl F. Keil, *Commentar über die Bücher der Makkabäer* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1875), 133; Büchler, "Levitical Impurity," 33 n. 83; Abraham Kahana, *The Apocryphal Books* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Tel Aviv: M'qoroth, 1937), 2:133; Abel, *Les livres des Maccabées*, 140; and Solomon Zeitlin in his commentary accompanying Sidney Tedesche, *The First Book of Maccabees: An English Translation* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950), 142. Regarding the effect of rabbinic literature on the Hebrew Josippon, see Flusser, *Josippon*, 2:112–15; Shulamit Sela, *The Arabic Josippon* [Hebrew], 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute and Tel Aviv University, 2009), 1:81–84.

⁶Daniel R. Schwartz, "The Other in I and II Maccabees," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 30–37.

gentile impurity, had it been familiar with the concept. Nevertheless, apart from this proposed, highly incidental reference, 1 Maccabees fails to mention gentile impurity or otherwise indicate its existence.⁷ Thus, attributing the concept of gentile impurity to 1 Maccabees appears to be anachronistic.

2. Does the text of 1 Maccabees otherwise support Nicanor's defilement of the priests and the elders? Christine Hayes noted that in 1 Macc 7:36, only two verses after Nicanor allegedly defiles the priests, the latter return to the temple and pray between the altar and the vestibule, a place accessed only by priests in a state of ritual purity—a clear indication that they had not been defiled.⁸

3. Do other ancient Hebrew versions of Nicanor's speech support the reading "defile"? The 13th of Adar, commemorating Nicanor's defeat by the Hasmoneans, is listed in the Scroll of Fasting, a brief listing of happy occasions when fasting is forbidden (hence, Ta'anit, "fasting") written in Aramaic and dating from the Second Temple period. The list is cited by rabbinic literature and accompanied by a later Hebrew scholion in two recensions, titled Parma and Oxford in modern research.⁹ Like 1 Maccabees, Scholion P (Parma) to the 13th of Adar also describes Nicanor's disparaging speech. It uses three verbs and an adverb: *דבר ... ומחרף ומגדף ... בגאווה*. The first two verbs, in the present participle, apparently used as synonyms, denote abusive speech: (Nicanor was) "blaspheming and reviling." The third verb, in the past tense, "spoke," together with the accompanying adverb, denotes arrogant speech.¹⁰ A parallel reference in the Palestinian Talmud adds to this string another verb—*נאץ* ("to spurn" or "to slander")—and thus contains four verbs (in the past tense), exactly as in 1 Macc 7:34: *דיבר באשמה ... וחרף וגידף ונאץ* ("and he blasphemed and reviled and slandered ... spoke in accusation").¹¹ Accordingly, the

⁷Even Alon, a prominent advocate of a prerabbinic Jewish concept of gentile impurity, was careful to set the *terminus post quem* for this concept in the middle of the first century BCE, that is, in the later Hasmonean period, several decades after the composition of 1 Maccabees ("Levitical Uncleaness of Gentiles," 165, 167, 187). On the dominant opinion that 1 Maccabees dates to the last three decades of the second century BCE, see Rappaport, *First Book of Maccabees*, 60–61.

⁸Hayes, *Gentile Impurities*, 52. Hannan Birenboim attempts to resolve the conundrum by stating that not all of the priests were defiled ("Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism" [Hebrew], *Cathedra* 139 [2011]: 8–30, here 18 n. 84).

⁹For a general review, see Vered Noam, "Megillat Taanit—The Scroll of Fasting," in *The Literature of the Sages*, part 2, *Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature*, ed. Shmuel Safrai et al., CRINT 2.3 (Assen: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 339–62.

¹⁰On the word *גאווה* in the sense of *גאווה* ("arrogance"), see Vered Noam, *Megillat Ta'anit: Versions, Interpretation, History, with a Critical Edition* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003), 155. For a biblical combination of the verbs *חרף*, *גדף*, and arrogant speech, see Zeph 2:8. Scholion O (Oxford) and b. Ta'anit 18b contain only the arrogant speech of Nicanor in their respective versions of the Nicanor story.

¹¹Y. Ta'anit 2:13 (66a) // Megillah 1:6 (70c), pp. 717 and 743, respectively, in the Palestinian Talmud edition of the Academy of the Hebrew Language (Jerusalem, 2001). In Megillah 1:3 (70c),

integrated recension of the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting uses at this point the same four verbs and an adverb (denoting arrogance); the first three verbs are present participles and the fourth is in the past tense: *ומחרר ומגדף ומנאץ ... דבר בגאווה* (“and he was blaspheming and reviling and slandering ... spoke in arrogance”).¹² A major difference between the rabbinic versions and 1 Macc 7:34, however, is that in 1 Maccabees Nicanor verbally abuses the *priests* and *elders*, whereas the rabbinic versions lack any direct object for his disparagement.

Based on textual analysis of 1 Maccabees and these parallel Hebrew versions of the Nicanor story, Vered Noam identifies two early branches of the story:¹³ one shared by 1 Maccabees and the Palestinian Talmud, and the other, represented by Scholion P (and the Babylonian Talmud). The latter, therefore, constitutes an alternative, authentic Hebrew version of the Nicanor story, independent of 1 Maccabees. Relevant to our discussion, both rabbinic versions of the Nicanor speech employ verbs that relate to the abusive nature of the speech and hence reinforce the incongruity of “defile” in 1 Macc 7:34. This conclusion would be further reinforced if indeed an affinity exists between the Palestinian Talmud version and the Hebrew text of 1 Maccabees.

II. THE PROPOSED THESIS

Hayes’s solution was to translate *ἐμίλανε* in 1 Macc 7:34 as “abused,” and she goes on to explain: “Nicanor ‘abused’ the priests by mocking them and by blaspheming against them and God’s house.”¹⁴ First, contrary to Hayes’s explanation, no causal relationship exists between *ἐμίλανε* and the two preceding verbs in this verse, or between it and the following verse (1 Macc 7:35), which contains Nicanor’s

גידר and *נאץ* change places. Note that in the Palestinian Talmud, the respective adverb stresses “accusation,” rather than “arrogance.”

¹²Noam, *Megillat Ta’anit*, 118–19. For an identical rabbinic combination of *ומחרר ומגדף ומנאץ* in relation to Titus, see Avot of Rabbi Nathan, recension B, 7; and Meir Ben Shahar, “Titus in the Holy of Holies,” in *Josephus and the Rabbis* [Hebrew], by Tal Ilan et al., 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2017), 2:741–68, here 743, 762.

¹³Vered Noam, *Shifting Images of the Hasmonians: Second Temple Legends and Their Reception in Josephus and Rabbinic Literature*, trans. Dena Ordan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 55. On the Nicanor saga in rabbinic literature, see also Menahem Kister, “Back and Forth: Aggadot and Midrashic Methods in the Literature of the Second Temple Period and in Rabbinic Literature” [Hebrew], in *Higayon L’Yona: New Aspects in the Study of Midrash, Aggadah and Piyyut in Honor of Prof. Yona Fraenkel*, ed. Joshua Levinson, Jacob Elbaum, and Galit Hazan-Rokem (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 231–59, here 234.

¹⁴In this interpretation, Hayes (*Gentile Impurities*, 52) follows George D’Oyly and Richard Mant, who over two centuries ago translated *ἐμίλανε* here as “abused shamefully” and explained: “Namely, he defiled their ears with blasphemous words” (*The Holy Bible according to the Authorized Version: With Notes, Explanatory and Practical*, 3 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1817], 2:871).

threat to the temple. Second, Hayes does not provide any substantiation for such a possible meaning of *μάλω*. Third, this Greek verb is used on four additional occasions in 1 Maccabees (1:46, 63; 4:45; 14:36), all in the sense of actual defilement (as opposed to the verbal abuse suggested by Hayes).¹⁵ Hence, the question remains: What prompted the Greek *ἐμίανεν* in 1 Macc 7:34?

I maintain that the third verb in the original Hebrew of 1 Macc 7:34 was probably *חרף* (“to taunt, reproach”), but the Greek translator read it as *חנף* (*qal* “to be polluted”; *hiphil* “to pollute,” mostly by bloodshed). In what follows, therefore, I will discuss the different meaning of these two Hebrew verbs in the relevant context of 1 Macc 7:34. I will first present my argument as to why the Hebrew verb used here may have been *חרף*. Next, I will present the case for a possible misreading on the part of the translator, who, furthermore, may even have been predisposed to read *חנף* instead. Finally, I will offer my suggestion as to why, in that case, he chose to translate it as *μάλω*.

III. THE BIBLICAL SENNACHERIB AFFAIR AS A CLUE TO THE HEBREW TEXT OF 1 MACCABEES 7:34

Along with other scholars, I have noted that God’s salvation of Jerusalem in the biblical Sennacherib siege story plays an important role in Hasmonean and post-Hasmonean Jewish literature.¹⁶ The effect of this biblical episode on the Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees (and in its ancient Jewish parallels)¹⁷ is particularly prominent. There is an apparent allusion to this biblical affair in 1 Macc 7:41, as well as

¹⁵See also 1 Macc 4:43 (*μιασμός* in the sense of the *Shikutz*, i.e., the idol or idolatrous cultic object that was placed in the temple under the persecution), 13:50 (*μιάσματα* in the sense of idols); and Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 3. Roman Wilk suggests that Nicanor’s words profaned the temple (“The Abuse of Nicanor’s Corpse” [Hebrew], *Sidra* 8 [1992]: 53–57, here 55 n. 12). The text, however, states explicitly that Nicanor *defiled the priests*. Furthermore, “to profane” is rendered in 1 Maccabees by *βεβηλόω* and its derivatives, occurring ten times: 1:43, 45, 48, 63; 2:12, 34; 3:51; 4:38, 44, 54. Note also that 1 Macc 7:42 fails to attach any practical, cultic implication to Nicanor’s subsequent explicit threat to the temple (in 7:35) and sums it up as *κακῶς ἐλάλησεν*, lit., “he spoke ill” (against the temple).

¹⁶Menahem Kister, “Legends of the Destruction of the Second Temple in Avot De-Rabbi Nathan” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 67 (1998): 483–529, here 513–17; Gerbern S. Oegema, “Sennacherib’s Campaign and Its Reception in the Time of the Second Temple,” in *Sennacherib at the Gates of Jerusalem: Story, History and Historiography*, ed. Isaac Kalimi and Seth Richardson, CHANE 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 325–45; Matan Orian, “Hyrcanus II versus Aristobulus II and the Inviolability of Jerusalem,” *JSQ* 22 (2015): 205–42, here 236–37.

¹⁷In addition to the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting and the Palestinian Talmud, mentioned above, 2 Macc 8:19 and 15:22 also refer to this biblical episode. In fact, Arie van der Kooij observed that the latter reference is a quotation of Isa 37:36 LXX (“The Use of the Greek Bible in II Maccabees,” *JNSL* 25.2 [1999]: 127–38, here 133).

the display of Nicanor's right hand in 7:47 (cf. 2 Macc 14:33; 15:30, 32–33)—a clear reference to Isa 10:32.¹⁸ The Isaian verse was accepted in other Judean Hebrew writings of the same period (apart from 1 Maccabees) as a reference to Sennacherib.¹⁹ The analogy to Sennacherib is further accentuated in the Hasmonean context through identification of the Assyrians with the Seleucids.²⁰

Against this background, it is probably not a coincidence that the stories of both the biblical Sennacherib and Nicanor contain disparaging speech of the foreign enemy. In other words, it would be reasonable to assume that the author of 1 Maccabees articulated Nicanor's arrogant and scornful speech in 7:34 based on the arrogant and scornful message of Sennacherib and his emissaries. Thus, the biblical verbs employed to describe the Assyrian speech (in 2 Kings, Isaiah, and 2 Chronicles), may well have been repeated in the original Hebrew text of 1 Macc 7:34. Since my argument involves a Greek translation from Hebrew, attention to the LXX translation of the relevant biblical verbs is warranted.

As shown clearly in the following table, the verb חרף is dominant in the biblical Sennacherib story,²¹ where it is also employed in conjunction with or even synonymous with גרף (see 2 Kgs 19:6 // Isa 37:6), “to revile,” or, following the LXX, “to blaspheme.” Unsurprisingly, חרף and גרף appear together also in the ancient

¹⁸As pointed out by Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 62; and Kister, “Back and Forth,” 235, *pace* Robert Doran, who, based on the difference in language between 2 Maccabees and Isa 10:32, concluded that there is no reference by the former to the latter (*2 Maccabees: A Critical Commentary*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012], 280 n. 10). Noam (*Shifting Images*, 46) suggests that, although 1 Maccabees refers eight times to the Temple Mount as “Mount Zion,” the occurrence of Mount Zion in 1 Macc 7:33 also echoes Isa 10:32. On “Mount Zion” as the temple in 1 Maccabees, see Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, 278; and David Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 176.

¹⁹That is, Sir 48:18, and perhaps also Peshar on Isaiah A (4Q161 = 4QpIsa^a); see Hanan Eshel, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*, SDSSRL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 97 n. 10. Modern research has proved that this specific prophecy of Isaiah concerns not Sennacherib but rather the campaign of Sargon II against Samaria in 720 BCE; see Shawn Z. Aster, “The Historical Background of the Prophecy in Isaiah 10:28–32” [Hebrew], *Judea and Samaria Studies* 17 (2008): 25–35.

²⁰Orian, “Hyrcaeus II versus Aristobulus II,” 236 n. 87; Eshel, *Dead Sea Scrolls*, 171 n. 27; Deborah L. Gera, *Judith*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 116; Andrew Teeter, “Isaiah and the Kings of As/Syria in Daniel's Final Vision: On the Rhetoric of Inner-Scriptural Allusion and the Hermeneutics of ‘Methodological Exegesis,’” in *A Teacher for All Generations: Essays in Honor of James C. VanderKam*, ed. Eric F. Mason et al., 2 vols., JSJSup 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 1:169–99. See, however, 4Q161 as an example of the use of a biblical text concerning the Assyrians in connection with a Ptolemaic threat to Jerusalem.

²¹It is also dominant in the biblical episode of David and Goliath (and is likewise translated as ὀνειδίζω in the LXX), which has echoes in the biblical Sennacherib story and in the Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees, as shown by Noam, *Shifting Images*, 47. On חרף and its semantic field in the Bible, see n. 28 below.

Verse	MT	NEB/NKJV	LXX 2 Kings	LXX Isaiah
2 Kgs 19:4 // Isa 37:4	לחרף	“to taunt,” “to reproach”	ὄνειδίξειν	ὄνειδίξειν
2 Kgs 19:6 // Isa 37:6	גדפו	“blasphemed,” “have blasphemed”	ἐβλασφήμησαν	ὠνειδισάν
2 Kgs 19:16 // Isa 37:17	לחרף	“to taunt,” “to reproach”	ὄνειδίξειν	ὄνειδίξειν
2 Kgs 19:22 // Isa 37:23	חרפת וגדפת	“you have taunted/ reproached and blasphemed”	ὠνειδισας και ἐβλασφήμησας	ὠνειδισας και παρώξυνας
2 Kgs 19:23 // Isa 37:24	חרפת	“you have (sent your servants) to taunt/ reproach”	ὠνειδισας	ὠνειδισας
2 Chr 32:17	לחרף	“to defy,” “to revile”	LXX ὄνειδίξειν	

rabbinic parallels to 1 Macc 7:34.²² The verb ὄνειδίξω, however, the LXX equivalent of לחרף in the above table, is absent from 1 Macc 7:34—and from 1 Maccabees as a whole.²³ Abraham Kahana, Elia Artom, and Noam suggest that לחרף in the original Hebrew of 1 Maccabees was rendered by a different Greek verb, δυσφημέω (“to speak ill of”) and its derivative noun, used in the same chapter 7 of 1 Maccabees:²⁴

²²In the Palestinian Talmud and the integrated recension of the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting, these words are accompanied by a third, similar verb, קנא (“to spurn” or “to slander”). Indeed, note the noun נאצה in 2 Kgs 19:3 // Isa 37:3.

²³The noun ὄνειδος appears twice (1 Macc 4:45, 58)—both instances in reference to the temple under the persecution—and was translated back into Hebrew as חרפה (“disgrace/reproach”) by Kahana (*Apocryphal Books*, 2:117–18), Artom (*Apocryphal Books*, 1:31–32), and Rappaport (*First Book of Maccabees*, 164–65). The noun ὄνειδισμός also appears twice (1:39, 10:70). In 1:39 it was translated back to Hebrew as כלמה (“shame”) by Kahana (2:101) and Artom (1:15), and as חרפה by Rappaport (111). In 10:70, ὄνειδισμός appears together with κατάγελως (“derision,” the noun derived from the second verb of 1 Macc 7:34, καταγέλω): εἰς καταγέλωτα και εἰς ὄνειδισμόν, translated by Artom (1:68) as לחרפה ובו (“into disgrace and contempt”) and by Kahana (2:149) and Rappaport (265) by the biblical hendiadys ולקלס וללעג (“an object of scorn and derision”), as in MT Pss 44:14 (LXX: μωκτηρισμός και κατάγελως) and 79:4 (LXX: μωκτηρισμός και χλευασμός). Compare with MT Jer 20:8 לקלס ולחרפה (“an object of taunt and derision”; LXX, εἰς ὄνειδισμόν ... και εἰς χλευασμόν).

²⁴Kahana, *Apocryphal Books*, 2:133; Artom, *Apocryphal Books*, 1:48–49; Vered Noam, “The Victory over Nicanor,” in Ilan et al., *Josephus and the Rabbis*, 1:168–91, here 179–80. On the familiarity of the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees with the LXX, and his frequent deviation from it, see Harry W. Ettelson, *The Integrity of I Maccabees*, Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 27 (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1925), 311–30;

7:41: ἐδυσφήμησαν (“they blasphemed”), a clear allusion to Sennacherib’s emissaries (חרפו)

7:38: δυσφημῖαι (“their blasphemies”), referring to Nicanor and his army (חרפות/חרופים)²⁵

The possible use of the verb חרף in 7:41, in summation of the relevant biblical Assyrian speech, and, more importantly, the possible use of the lexeme חרף in 7:38, as an intratextual reference to Nicanor’s speech in verse 34, would place further emphasis on the idiosyncrasy of the apparent absence of any Greek equivalent of חרף from verse 34 itself.

Might any of the other three Greek verbs in 1 Macc 7:34 (leaving ἐμίανεν aside) “represent” חרף? The fourth verb, with the accompanying adverb, ἐλάλησεν ὑπερφάνως, clearly denotes arrogant speech. The first two verbs—ἐμυκτήρισεν and κατεγέλασεν—stress the jeer in Nicanor’s speech²⁶ and are accordingly translated by a number of scholars.²⁷ True, in the Bible (and as reflected in the NEB translation I

and Bezael Bar-Kochva, *Judas Maccabaeus: The Jewish Struggle against the Seleucids* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 169.

²⁵The parallel word in 2 Macc 15:24 is βλασφημῖαι. See also the reference to Nicanor as δύσφημος in 2 Macc 15:32. To complete the picture, notice the single verb (a participle) used by Josephus to paraphrase the entire verse of 1 Macc 7:34: ὁ δὲ βλασφημήσας αὐτούς (“he blasphemed them,” *Ant.* 12.10.5 §406), translated by Abraham Schalit as חירפם (*Antiquity of the Jews in Hebrew* [Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1944–1963], 3:69). Scholars debate whether Josephus used the Hebrew text of 1 Maccabees alongside its Greek translation; see Louis H. Feldman, “Josephus’ Portrayal of the Hasmonaeans,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Studies in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers, StPB 41 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41–68, here 41 n. 3; Étienne Nodet, *La crise maccabéenne: Historiographie juive et traditions bibliques*, Josèphe et son temps 6 (Paris: Cerf, 2005), 415–23. It should be added that Rappaport also translates the verb in 1 Macc 7:41 as חרפו but the plural noun in verse 38 as נאצות (*First Book of Maccabees*, 217–18).

²⁶Compare with the verb ἐμπαίζω (“to mock”) in 1 Macc 9:26.

²⁷Kahana (*Apocryphal Books*, 2:133), Artom (*Apocryphal Books*, 1:48), and Rappaport (*First Book of Maccabees*, 216), translate them back into Hebrew as synonymous denoting scorn: ויהתל / וילעג / וילעג / וילעג / וילעג / וילעג / וילעג, respectively. Scholz, *Die Bücher der Makkabäer*, 107: “spottete” and “verlachte”; Emil Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1900), 1:55, and Keil, *Commentar über die Bücher der Makkabäer*, 133: “verspottete und verlachte”; and Lawrence H. Schiffman, “1 Maccabees,” in *Outside the Bible: Ancient Jewish Writings Related to Scripture*, ed. Louis H. Feldman, James L. Kugel, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2013), 3:2769–2831, here 2795: “mocked and derided.” See also Tedesche, *First Book of Maccabees*, 143: “sneered and jeered”; Bartlett, *First and Second Books of the Maccabees*, 101: “mocked and jeered”; Bévenot, *Die beiden Makkabäerbücher*, 99: “verspottete” and “lachte”; Harrington, *First and Second Maccabees*, 48: “mocked and ridiculed”; and Goldstein, *I Maccabees*, 327: “mocked and laughed.” Cf. Abel, *Les livres des Maccabées*, 141: “se moqua” and “traita avec mépris”; and Francis Borchart, *The Torah in 1 Maccabees: A Literary Critical Approach to the Text*, DCLS 19 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 277: “sneered and humiliated.”

used in the above table), the semantic field of חרף may include “taunt” or “derision” and the like.²⁸ However, the LXX translates this verb almost exclusively as *ὀνειδίζω*,²⁹ thus indicating a dominant understanding of this verb in the Second Temple period as “to reproach.” Note also two other verbs employed in the biblical Sennacherib affair to denote scoffing, in the response of the daughter of Zion to the Assyrians. In fact, the first verb of 1 Macc 7:34, *ἐμυκτήρησεν*, and the second of these two verbs, are identical:

Verse	MT	NEB/NKJV	LXX 2 Kings	LXX Isa
2 Kgs 19:21 // Isa 37:22	בוזה, לעגה	“(she) disdains, laughs you to scorn / (has) despised, laughed you to scorn”	<i>ἔξουδένησεν, ἐμυκτήρησεν</i>	<i>ἐφάυλισεν, ἐμυκτήρησεν</i>

Thus, the puzzling absence of חרף from 1 Macc 7:34 remains. To sum up the argument so far:

1. The Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees is analogous to the biblical Sennacherib affair, including the corresponding, disparaging speech of the Assyrians and the Syrian (Seleucid) Nicanor.
2. The verb חרף (translated by the LXX as *ὀνειδίζω*) is central to this biblical Assyrian speech, where it is also associated with the verb גרף (“to revile” or “to blaspheme”).
3. The verb חרף appears in the ancient rabbinic parallels to 1 Macc 7:34 (in conjunction with גרף).
4. The first two verbs employed in 1 Macc 7:34, *ἐμυκτήρησεν* and *κατεγέλασεν*, stress the jeer in Nicanor’s speech. This does not correspond to the understanding of חרף, at least as reflected in the LXX but perhaps already in the biblical Sennacherib affair as well.
5. The lexeme חרף may have appeared in two other places in the Hebrew original of the Nicanor story in 1 Macc 7 in reference to both speeches—that of the Assyrians (v. 41) and that of Nicanor (v. 38). The relevant Hebrew lexeme was translated in both instances into Greek with the verb *δυσφημέω* (“to speak ill of”) and its derivative noun.

²⁸ See Ernst Kutsch, “חרף,” *TDOT* 5:209–15; BDB, s.vv. “[חַרְפָּה, חֲרַף]”; *HALOT*, s.v. “חרף II,” and, as an example, the aforementioned hendiadys *לחרפה ולקלס* (“an object of taunt and derision”) in Jer 20:8. On *חרפת מצרים* (“the disgrace of Egypt”) in Josh 5:9, see Ed Noort, “The Disgrace of Egypt: Joshua 5.9a and Its Context,” in *The Wisdom of Egypt: Jewish, Early Christian, and Gnostic Essays in Honour of G. P. Luttikhuisen*, ed. Anthony Hilhorst and George H. van Kooten, AGJU 59 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3–19.

²⁹ Compare the entry “חרף” in Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1990), 401, with HRCS, s.v. “ὀνειδίζω.”

In light of the above, I suggest that, in the sequence of verbs in 1 Macc 7:34, חרף was the third verb in the original Hebrew text.³⁰ If that was the case, why did the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees choose to translate it here with *μιαίνω*?

III. HOW DID חרף BECOME חנף?

Perhaps a slight distortion of the script or a possible misreading led the Greek translator to read חנף instead of חרף in 1 Macc 7:34. Misreadings are, after all, evident in 1 Macc 3:15 (יֹסֵף instead of יֹאסֹף),³¹ 6:34 (הַרְוּ instead of הַרְאוּ),³² 7:29 (אֹיְבִים instead of אֹרְבִים),³³ and perhaps also 3:48 (חַקְרוּ instead of חַקְקוּ).³⁴ We should also remember that in Hebrew *nun* (נ) and *resh* (ר) are two of the four letters that comprise the group of liquid consonants (together with *lamed* and *mem*; similarly, λ, μ, ν, and ρ in Greek). As such, they are susceptible to phonological in-group interchange, affected by pronunciation rather than script.³⁵

Notwithstanding the above, an inevitable question arises: is it plausible that the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees would not have sensed חנף to be out of context in 7:34?³⁶ The answer is that perhaps something else suggested to the translator that

³⁰Regarding the possible declination of this root in the original Hebrew of verse 34, the Palestinian Talmud version here reads חִירֵי, that is, the past tense, whereas the integrated recension of the scholion to the Scroll of Fasting reads מַחֲרֵי, the present tense, and the Hebrew Josippon has וַיִּחְרֵי (future tense denoting past) (Flusser, *Josippon*, 1:103).

³¹Noted by Rappaport (*First Book of Maccabees*, 143), crediting Moshe Shwabe and Ezra Z. Melamed with this observation.

³²Noted by Ettelson (*Integrity of I Maccabees*, 309), crediting Julius Wellhausen.

³³Noted by Bar-Kochva (*Judas Maccabaeus*, 356), crediting Abraham Kahana.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 252, crediting Alexander F. Kirkpatrick. For a similar confusion of these two verbs, see the LXX rendering of מַחֲקִיקִים in Judg 5:14 as ἐξέρευσιν ὄντες.

³⁵Here are but three illustrative examples for the interchange of ר and נ, from the MT and LXX (for additional examples, see Friedrich Delitzsch, *Die Lese- und Schreibfehler im Alten Testament* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1920], 112): (1) MT Deut 23:14 reads אָזְנֶךָ (lit., “your ear”) instead of אָזְרֶךָ (“your waistband”), reflected in the LXX τῆς ζώνης σου, as the place where one should carry a digging tool; (2) the LXX uses ῥάσσω as one equivalent for רִטַּשׁ (“to dash, mangle to death”), but in MT Jer 23:33 and 39 the Hebrew verb is נָטַשׁ (“to abandon”), which makes more sense in the context; (3) the verb נָחַם (“to comfort”) occasionally replaces רָחַם (“to show mercy”), e.g., in MT Hos 11:8bβ, or Ezek 24:24a, and vice versa (see LXX Isa 12:1, 52:9, and Zech 1:17). For the interchange of בַּחֵן (“to assay”) and בָּחַר (“to choose”), see Aloysius Fitzgerald, “The Interchange of L, N, and R in Biblical Hebrew,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 481–88, here 487–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3265393>; Shlomo Naeh, “From the Bible to the Talmud (and Back): Lexical Studies in Hebrew and Aramaic,” in *Hebrew through the Ages: In Memory of Shoshana Bahat* [Hebrew], ed. Moshe Bar-Asher (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 1997), 133–49, here 136–37. I thank Noam Mizrahi for the latter reference.

³⁶In the Hebrew Bible, the direct object of the verb חָנַף is almost exclusively הָאָרֶץ (“the land”) and not people (the exception, Dan 11:32, will be discussed below).

the relevant Hebrew verb here was indeed חנף, thus overriding its potential mismatch. That “something” is 1 Macc 1:24b.

1 Maccabees 1:24b and חנף as μαινω

Compare 1 Macc 1:24b (concerning Antiochus IV) with 1 Macc 7:34b (concerning Nicanor):

1:24b: καὶ ἐποίησε φονοκτονίαν καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφανίαν μεγάλην

and he caused pollution by bloodshed and spoke in great arrogance

7:34b: καὶ ἐμίανεν αὐτούς καὶ ἐλάλησεν ὑπερηφάνως

and he defiled them and spoke arrogantly

The ending of both verses (underlined) is almost identical: “spoke in great arrogance,” and “spoke arrogantly.” Daniel Schwartz suggests that in verse 1:24b the Hebrew original of φονοκτονία (apparently an innovation of the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees) was a noun form of the root חנף, following Isa 32:6.³⁷ Indeed, as in 1 Macc 1:24b, in the Isaian verse this noun—describing a villain’s deed—is juxtaposed with the villain’s improper (i.e., deceptive) speech (directed against God): לעשות חנף ולדבר אל ה' תועה (“to practice ungodliness, to utter error against the LORD” NKJV). The possibility therefore exists that, in light of his own translation of 1 Macc 1:24b,³⁸ the translator’s posited misreading in 7:34 was affected, or reinforced, by his impression of חנף + “spoke in arrogance” as a recurring combination in 1 Maccabees in relation to these two key Seleucid rivals to the Hasmoneans, Antiochus IV and Nicanor.

The verb φονοκτονέω is attested prior to Christianity only in LXX Num 35:33 (two occurrences) and LXX Ps 105:38. In all three instances, it has the meaning “to pollute with murder or blood.”³⁹ Since this meaning was clearly extreme and unsupported by the narrative of Nicanor’s confrontation with the elders and the

³⁷Daniel R. Schwartz, “Antiochus the נבל (1 Maccabees 1:24)” [Hebrew], *Shnaton* 13 (2002): 185–97, here 194; Eng. trans. “Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Jerusalem,” in *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. David M. Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick, and Daniel R. Schwartz, *STDJ* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 45–56, here 48.

³⁸The LXX, however, did not understand חנף in Isa 32:6 as bloodshed but rather as ἀνομα (“lawless acts”). For the various meanings of חנף in the Bible, see Klaus Seybold, “חנף,” *TDOT* 5:36–44. For its meaning in Daniel, see also n. 42 below.

³⁹See LSJ, s.v. “φονοκτονέω.” LXX Num 35:33: καὶ οὐ μὴ φονοκτονήσητε τὴν γῆν ... τὸ γὰρ αἷμα τοῦτο φονοκτονεῖ τὴν γῆν; compare MT: כִּי הַדָּם הוּא יַחַנְפֵּךְ אֶת הָאָרֶץ ... לֹא תַחַנְפּוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ, “You shall not pollute the land ... for blood pollutes the land.” LXX Ps 105:38: καὶ ἐφονοκτονήθη ἡ γῆ ἐν τοῖς αἵμασι; compare MT 106:38: וַתַּחַנְפוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ בַּדָּמִים, “the land was polluted with blood.” Symmachus also used φονοκτονέω to translate the verb חנף in Isa 24:5 (וְהָאָרֶץ חֲנֵפָה, “the land was polluted”); see Frederick Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt: Veterum interpretum graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1875), 2:469.

priests, it appears that the Greek translator of 1 Maccabees chose for 7:34 a verb that denotes defilement in general, namely, *μιάλω*.⁴⁰ There are two similar uses of *μιάλω* in the LXX as a less-drastic equivalent for חנף in contexts that do not refer to bloodshed. In Jer 3:1, 2, the context is moral defilement of the land by adultery.⁴¹ Referring to Antiochus IV, Dan 11:32 reads: ומרשיעי ברית יחניף (“he will flatter/defile the violators of the covenant”). Those who violate the covenant are Jews who, under the religious persecution launched by the king, were induced to apostatize.⁴² The LXX employed *μιάλω*, indicating that the translator understood the verb as referring to the defilement that results from this apostasy from the point of view of Jewish law.

IV. SUMMARY

In the middle of a string of verbs that describe Nicanor’s speech, *ἐμίανεν* is, in all likelihood, an error. This is underscored by 1 Macc 7:36, which indicates that the priests were not defiled. First Maccabees 7:36 also refutes the suggestion that Nicanor’s saliva, a source of impurity due to the fact that he was a gentile, defiled the priests. This idea recurs in commentaries on 1 Maccabees, even though it is based on a later, rabbinic tale illustrating the concept of gentile impurity. Yet the concept of gentile impurity is otherwise unfamiliar to 1 Maccabees. Furthermore, the ancient Hebrew versions of the same episode, in Scholion P to the Scroll of Fasting and in the Palestinian Talmud, suggest that the third verb in 1 Macc 7:34 must also have described Nicanor’s disparaging speech.

In light of the dominant role played by the Hebrew verb חרף in the derogatory speech of the Assyrians as part of the biblical Sennacherib affair, which figures in the background of the Nicanor story in 1 Maccabees, and in light of this verb’s appearance in the parallels offered by the Palestinian Talmud and Scholion P to the Scroll of Fasting, as well as the possible occurrence of this lexeme in 1 Macc 7, including an intratextual reference (in v. 38) to verse 34, it would have been only reasonable for this verb to appear in 7:34. None of the other three Greek verbs in this verse apparently represents חרף.

⁴⁰ Another Greek verb that denotes defilement, *μολύνω*, is used once in 1 Maccabees in 1:37 in the context of defilement by bloodshed. The LXX used this verb for חנפו in Jer 23:11.

⁴¹ The same notion is repeated in Jer 3:9, but the relevant part of the verse is absent from the LXX. For variant ancient Greek translations that use *φονοκτονέω* in this verse, see Joseph Ziegler, *Jeremias*, SVTG 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1957), 162.

⁴² Indeed, Theodotion’s Greek translation has the verb *ἐπάγω* (“to induce/seduce”) here. This verse from Daniel, therefore, may represent the semantic development of חנף, acquiring the sense of “to flatter.” See David Flusser, “Some of the Precepts of the Torah from Qumran (4QMMT) and the Benediction against the Heretics” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 61 (1992): 333–74, here 342.

I contend, therefore, that, in the original Hebrew, the third verb in 1 Macc 7:34 was *חָרַח*, read by the Greek translator as *חָנַח*. In addition to the possibility of yet another innocent slight misreading on the part of this translator, or, perhaps, a phonological in-group interchange of consonants, reading *חָנַח* in this position falls in line with the translator's understanding and treatment of a similar textual combination in 1 Macc 1:24b. Here, as suggested by Schwartz, the translator employed *φονοακτονία* for the nominal form of *חָנַח*. The verb *φονοακτονέω*, in the sense of "to pollute with murder or blood," was clearly too severe in the context of Nicanor's confrontation with the elders and the priests. Consequently, the Greek translator sought a semantically proximal verb on the same spectrum and opted for *μιάνω*, which he employed on four additional occasions where it clearly refers to actual (i.e., nonverbal) defilement.